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House Velghe- Vanderlinden Deinze, Belgium, 2002

Juliaan Lampens's work is strongly defined by architectural detail that enters the creation process from the very beginning.



It's only a detail

Standing-out / Outstanding

Neither interested in the latest ‘-isms’, nor wanting to belong to the momentaneous spotlights of the *happy fancy*, Lampens consistently focused on the hard work itself. Through his self imposed ‘standing-out’ off-centre he has long been shunned by architectural critics yet this peripheral attitude enabled him to silently continue on the essence of his work by which he has become ‘outstanding’ in a timeless way as an architect.

“We have to be aware of the details from the very beginning of the design process as details are essential to complete architecture. It might be very easy to work out good concepts, but we have to complete beautiful details at the early design stage to actually build architecture. This “switch” can be cultivated by repeated experiences, and one of the experiences is drawing”

(1)

This quote touches on two important elements when it comes to architectural detail: firstly, it emphasises the constitutive capacities of architectural detail for the whole architecture it is part of, indicating that detail has to be present from the very beginning of the design process; secondly, it expresses the nature of the creation process itself, with a clear advocacy in favour of drawing ⁽²⁾ as the basic method of the architect.

Writing a piece on architectural detail implies that one has to make choices. How does one define architectural detail, what does it do, what does it serve, and by what is it being served?

I have chosen these two drawings (Fig. 01 and Fig. 02), owing to several reasons.

Firstly, Lampens's advocacy in favour of the drawing is the reason why I have chosen drawings of an architectural fragment that has remained unbuilt. The drawing is the *locus* where the architectural detail is developed by the architect, and where the detail can be observed and savoured to its full extent.

Secondly, it is a most dense, intense piece of architecture, fully integrated with and generated by its 'detail'.

Thirdly, in the drawings at hand here one can trace hesitation and trial. Drawing—especially drawing by hand—is capable of expressing how the architect thinks, how he connects the whole with the detail.

Fourthly, the drawings have not been published before, apart from being part of a great exhibition on the body of work, held at Sint-Lucas School of Architecture in Ghent (November 2006 – January 2007).

Fifthly, these drawings were made by Lampens himself in the latter days of his practice, when he no longer had apprentices in the office. There is no date on the drawings, but within the Lampens Foundation, we estimate that they date back to 2004, shortly after the house was finished in 2002.

The whole—the fragment—the detail

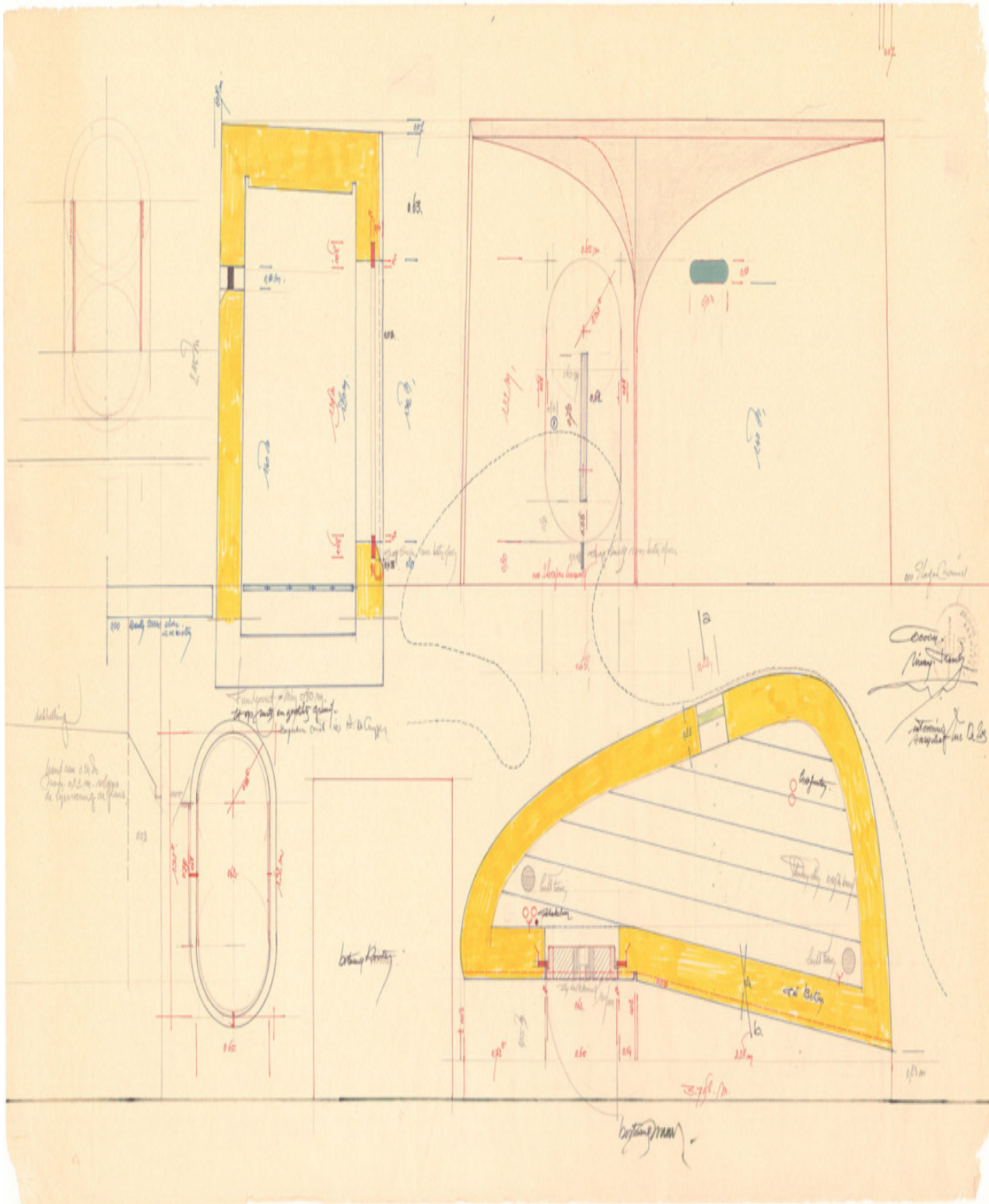


Fig.01 – House Velghe-Vanderlinden : plan, section, elevation, details / pencil, ballpoint, fountain pen, markers on paper, scale 1/10, size original drawings 88 x 56 cm © Juliaan Lampens Foundation

The first drawing describes 'in detail' a fragment of the house. The architect has to organise a mereological ⁽³⁾ negotiation between the *whole* and the *detail*, and this negotiation passes through the *fragment*. Hence, the role of the architectural fragment is crucial, and the meaning and information that oscillates between the whole and the detail passes through the fragment.

The fragment investigates a cocoon for one person. Here, the cocoon as a whole is inevitably constituted by the nature, the materiality and the size of its details, which resonate in each fragment (part) of this drawing. Each fragment (part) of the drawing is connected to the other fragments (parts) of the drawing through the readable nature and consistency of its details. The cocoon is a female body of architecture reminiscent to the female womb. It is designed for the lady of the house who wishes to withdraw in contemplation. It is a regression cell intended to take a human being back to the embryonal state of her life.



The thicknesses of the massive concrete walls are a promise of silence. But one can only read these thicknesses on the plan and the section. Confronted with the real edifice itself, however, the outer appearance of this cocoon shows one curved and two plain surfaces, suggesting a massive block of substance, only suggesting that there is a hollow and thicknesses through the small oval opening (Fig. 01, top right: elevation, opening in blue). Only the door, hidden in a narrow passage between this architectural fragment and the main body of the house (Fig. 01, bottom: the grey pencil line with the annotation "bestaande muur", Dutch for "existing wall ⁽⁴⁾"), suggests that there is something more, yet the outer surface of the door is the continuation of the surface of the

concrete wall, leaving the thickness of the walls and the depth of this concrete body as veiled secrets. One needs to open the door to find out how thick and deep this secret is.

A closer observation of the full scale detail (Fig. 02) adds information when combining the reading thereof with the drawing of the fragment (Fig. 01): thick steel plates (15mm) (see also the oval ring on the fragment drawing, Fig. 01 bottom left) are incorporated into the formwork of the concrete before pouring, making the steel an unyielding part of the concrete body of the cocoon.

The thickness of the door (see Fig. 02) intensifies the experience of silence and immersion into 'the womb'. through its massive materialisation in multi-layered plywood - the outer surface is cold stainless steel, the inner surface is soft ,warm plywood -, and its oval form is reminiscent of a submarine door (see Fig. 01: elevation-top right, and further detail-bottom left). In the thickness of the door, another thick 'door in a door' appears: a narrow but massive wooden ventilation hatch in the middle of the door is carved precisely in order to fit with the grasping fingers that want to open it. A detail with such intensity needs the full scale drawing (Fig. 02) to investigate its impact on our bodily experience. The thickness of this subtracted piece of wood corresponds with the estimated remoteness from the outer world, hence with all the other details that have to confirm this basic architectural longing. Mereologically. No glass, only a mosquito net that spans the narrow vertical perforation of the door.

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